# Somatic Shape and Emotions

## *Integrating Formative Psychology with Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy*

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### ABSTRACT

The thesis of this paper is that the body psychotherapy model of Formative Psychology can be combined successfully with the emotion-centric model of Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy (AEDP) to enhance clinical outcomes for individuals. AEDP softens defenses and regulates anxiety by privileging positive experience, and being actively responsive in order to access adaptive core affective experience or seek to transform maladaptive affect. The Formative Psychology How technique can be applied to the somatic shapes of the AEDP defense/survival strategies, maladaptive affect, or complex self-states. The How technique increases a somatic shape to understand its meaning and function, then undoes the shape to discover a more resilient, resourceful body organizing. The paper explores and analyzes two case studies that illustrate and offer qualitative evidence for the paper's thesis. The conclusion is that Formative Psychology and AEDP are complementary models that successfully work together to access adaptive core affective experience, deepen it with congruent somatic shapes, and help undo the stuck places of maladaptive affect.


***Keywords:*** Formative Psychology, AEDP, emotion, body

Submitted:09.29.2023
Accepted: 06.15.2024
International Body Psychotherapy Journal
The Art and Science of Somatic Praxis
Volume 23, Number 1,
2024, pp. 72-83
ISSN 2169-4745 Printing, ISSN 2168-1279 Online
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> ***Formative Psychology explores the somatic shape of an emotion with micro-movements that either intensify or lessen the body organizing of an emotional experience.***

## Body

The body psychotherapy field has a long history of describing the somatic shape of an individual and its significance to a client's well-being (Marlock and Weiss, 2015). An innovation in this paper is to point to how the body psychotherapy model of Formative Psychology can both benefit from and contribute to the psychotherapy model of Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy (AEDP). AEDP is a sophisticated and efficient model for working with emotions. Consistent with this paper's thesis is that combining these two models will have an enhanced outcome effect for the client, given the positive complementary effects these two models can achieve. They can both give to and benefit from each other.

An important insight in Formative Psychology is that individuals have a unique somatic shape relative to most experiences in life. These experiences

can include disappointment, urgency, dismissal, temptation, holding onto and letting go, being in love, plus a myriad of other emotional experiences. The somatic shape, how the body organizes itself in an experience, can be very helpful as a therapy intervention in enhancing and making possible an individual's capacity to experience, express, and receive emotions fully. Therapists can either see an incongruent shape that is inhibiting the individual's full access to feelings, or they can invite the individual to be curious about the tensions in their body, and explore the body organizing meaning in their current life situation (Keleman, 1975, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1994).

Formative Psychology offers an important tool for working with emotions. It can be used to help an individual undo a defense, regulate anxiety, deepen an emotion, or undo being stuck in maladaptive affects like despair, hopelessness, or loneliness. It explores the somatic shape of an emotion with micro-movements that either intensify or lessen the body organizing of an emotional experience. Each body organizing of an emotion has a specific meaning and unique opportunities for choice, action, and healing (Keleman, 1987; Downing, 2015).

An important focus of AEDP is helping an individual get to a new experience of affect, agency, or intimacy, and then deepening this experience with meta-therapeutic processing. AEDP tracks glimmers of the positive, and enhances these beginnings. It privileges the positive to resource the client, regulate anxiety, and bypass defenses. It uses empathy, responsive attuned therapist engaging, naming, joining, pausing and being with, sensing, shame reduction with validation, agency, early attachment cooing, and micro-tracking to help create safety, connection, and interpersonal care to undo aloneness, grow a secure therapy relationship, and create transformative healing experience with resourced corrective experiences (Fosha, 2000, 2021; Russell, 2015; Prenn, 2011).

When these insights and skills of Formative Psychology are combined with the important insights and skills of AEDP, much creative synergy can result. It is the goal of this paper to articulate how these two psychology models can work together to enhance emotional work with body focus. This goal is pursued by both theoretical discussion and the use of two case studies to illustrate the points and provide qualitative evidence.

## Formative Psychology and AEDP

### Important models of change

Stanley Keleman's Formative method for change, known as the *How Technique*, involves five steps (Keleman, 1987).

- **Step 1** involves noticing what somatic shape one forms regarding a particular situation in relation to one's self or others.
- **Step 2** comprises exploring and being curious about this shape by intensifying it with micro-movements, and noticing what feelings, perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors are tied to each somatic shape a person creates.
- **Step 3** often requires undoing this shape by lessening it with micro-movements, and noticing what new ways of being result and are possible as one explores each new shape. Each way of organizing the body has its own accompanying feelings, perceptions, sense of agency, intimacy prospects with self or others, new cognitions, grounded self, etc.
- **Step 4** has to do with pausing and exploring a new shape that feels helpful and resource-rich; listening to what it is like, and being open to its freedoms as well as its likely awkwardness.
- Step 5 involves sitting with what has happened, and noting how one can choose to return to this useful somatic shape and make it a part of one's future life.

Diana Fosha developed AEDP as a four-state model of change for working with emotional experience, intimacy, and agency (Fosha 2000; 2021). An array of change affects accompany each state. The AEDP model involves a State 1 that represents the current compromised self with its defenses (developmental survival strategies) and prohibitive affects of anxiety and shame that a person has acquired growing up. The model seeks to help the client to move from the inhibitory constraints of State 1 into a new experience of affect, agency, and intimacy, known as State 2. The model aims to help the client regulate anxiety, and explore the healthy survival role of their defenses as well as their current barriers to experience. Validating a defense can help the client feel less shame, and be more open to a new experience in State 2. Additionally, AEDP privileges the positive as a means to resource the client's nervous system and set the stage for having a State 2

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experience. After a client is able to have a new experience of affect, intimacy, or agency, then the goal is to deepen this new experience in State 3 by metaprocessing it, pausing with it, exploring what it is like, and deepening it in the body. Sometimes a client will drop down into a core affect state, known as State 4, in which the client feels fully in touch with feelings like genuine fit, a sense of deep personal truth, and feelings of enhanced wellbeing.

From the perspective of the triangle of experience, an AEDP tool, State 1 is at the top of the triangle. The top left of the triangle involves defensive behavior and survival strategies. The top right of the triangle represents the inhibitory affects of anxiety, guilt and shame. At the bottom of the triangle exits both maladaptive affect and adaptive core affective experience (Pando-Mars, 2021).

## Integrating Formative Psychology and AEDP: Insights, Skills and Models of Change

### Formative Psychology within the AEDP model

Opportunities to apply the Formative How technique within the AEDP model are many. For example, one can explore the somatic shape of a defense – in other words, beginning in State 1. As one intensifies or undoes the defense, the therapist and client find themselves in State 2, where the client is having a new experience that they can explore and be curious about. When one asks ultimately what this experience is like, and uses the metaprocess tool, one finds oneself in State 3 of the AEDP model. And at some point, one may find a somatic shape that feels very helpful and fitting, in which case one can be at State 4 of the AEDP model.

Another important use of the Formative How technique is with maladaptive affect. This is the affect tied to states of despair, helplessness, and hopelessness. This is not a categorical affect like anger or sadness, which have adaptive action tendencies towards completion. Maladaptive affect is a serious way an individual is stuck. This is State 2 work. AEDP often uses the Internal Family Systems parts model with excellent results when working with maladaptive affect. Likewise, I am arguing that the application of the Formative How technique to states like despair, helplessness, and lacking hope can be equally effective and is most worthy of integrating into the AEDP model.

Lamagna (2021) and Russell (2015) agree that it is important to create differentiation from maladaptive affect so that space exists between the self and aversive experience, thus opening the door to holding, tracking, and transforming the maladaptive affect. The AEDP portrayal and the Formative How technique are ways to achieve this task. Fosha (2000) sees portrayals as the "pinnacle of experiential-dynamic affect work" (p. 284).

### AEDP within the Formative Psychology model

If one begins therapy with the Formative How technique by exploring an individual's somatic shape around a particular experience, dream, feeling or problem, then one can be curious about the meaning of the shape of the affective experience, and what occurs as one first intensifies and then later does less of this particular body organizing. If one is working with maladaptive affect, then one can seek to transform it by seeking its meaning, and listening to what sort of suffering and desires it points to and healing paths it needs.

One can begin using the How technique with a defense, an avoidant behavior, confusing feelings or thoughts, specific body tensions, parts of the self, and sensory or affective states. One could look at the somatic shape of catastrophic thinking or hope, bitterness, or impatience. The possibilities are large. As one explores the meaning of a somatic shape, new experience is generated to metaprocess and explore. Intensifying the shape can clarify its purpose, and undoing it can open up new body organizing that is more grounded, centered, and

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available to embodying self-expression, receptivity, feelings, self-agency, and intimacy. All of this can be happening within the AEDP framework of attuned mirroring, responsiveness, and privileging the positive. Giving positive emotions enough time to sink into the body and metaprocessing them to help a client understand and sense their rightness can help to "broaden-and-build" new neurobiological healing transformation (Frederickson, 2009; Yeung, 2021).

## Formative Psychology within the AEDP Model: The case of Anya

### Background

Anya has been in therapy for approximately six months prior to this session. She has developmental trauma from a father who was unavailable and unkind. My first intervention is to get a deeper sense of her hurt. I find out she has no desire to forgive her father. She did no harm, hence feels no reason to forgive. She feels a deep lack of trust. She has more closeness to her grandparents and mother. Trust requires showing interest and care for her. As her therapist, I make a point to show interest and care, and to display both empathy and responsiveness. I also help her to feel connected and not alone in the therapy office – all of which are key skills in the AEDP model. Anya shares that she is surprised at her father's cluelessness in the area of parenting, and feels he shouldn't have had kids. I speak of nice narcissists (Behary, 2012), and this resonates with her. Anya is concerned that if she shares her feelings with her father, he will have a panic attack, which has happened in the past. She is upset her father feels that she owes him care later in life.

## Portrayals and their purpose: Working with emotional experience and somatic shape

As an intervention, I suggest we use an experiential portrayal to help Anya differentiate from her father, access her unknown and/or unexpressed feelings and thoughts about him, and by doing so, seek to help her heal, feel safer around her father, and be able to create boundaries with him. In AEDP terms, she can make the implicit explicit regarding her lived experience with her father, seek a self-corrective experience, and discover implicit somatic shapes she has embodied in her life tied to him. Consistent with Formative Psychology, we will seek to discover and explore the body organizing of her developmental self, work to undo self-destructive somatic shapes, and create new healthier ways of being. We will move through cycles of imagined responsiveness or not, different feelings and insights, and engage with client reactions to new cycles of affect and memories as the implicit becomes explicit. Finally, we will use the dynamics of the portrayal process to test and solidify new body organizing within the changing interpersonal and intrapersonal contexts.

## Anya's portrayal with her father

### A AEDP work within the portrayal

I have the client imagine her father across from her in a portrayal. I ask what she notices in her body and what she might like to say.

She says, "Papa, I think you know at some level you were neglectful and forgive yourself. You should know that I know, and that I do not forgive you. You made a mistake and hurt me. You think I should take care of you, but I do not want to, and feel you do not deserve it. You do not realize how toxic your neglect was on your wife, and yes, you are a nice narcissist and took behaviors to protect yourself."

I ask the AEDP metaprocessing question, "What was it like to say that?"

Anya says, "It is hurtful."

I ask what she sees in her father's face. She shares an imagined "blank stare" and perhaps a "storming off." Anya reports she can't imagine healthy responsiveness from him. I ask what other feel-

ings are there. In the portrayal, she shares with her father: "I'm sad that I grew up in a middle-class family with an unavailable father."

I inquire about her body. She shares that her sadness is spreading throughout her body quickly, and she is feeling a sense of stillness. Anya enters into a sensory awakening and hears birds outside the office windows. This is a good clinical outcome. Anya is entering more into the ventral vagal complex (Porges, 2011). Feeling her sadness fully is grounding and is resourcing her a bit.

At this point, I notice she is in a particular somatic shape in relation to her father; her ankles are crossed and her hands are compliantly folded. I will address this soon in the unfolding portrayal. Anya then has a memory of a garden between her house and her grandmother's. This is a potential resource, as her tie to her grandma was strong.

I suggest she feel the garden. She reports: "It's comfortable, familiar, and homelike." Yet it also contrasts with her experience with her father, and hence also deepens her sense of upset and depression.

Anya next shares with her father: "I'm angry because I feel you behaved in a way beneath your emotional capacity. It is infuriating that you either did not know or did not care." Anya shares with me that she does not deserve to feel shame about everything. She reports that she feels it and hides it. Anya is beginning to have an insight.

I ask AEDP metaprocess questions: "What is this like to not deserve shame, to feel it and to hide it, and to have the shame not be so internalized?" I psychoeducate that it was not her fault.

She shares the insight: "I took my Dad's lack of shame and put in on myself!" I suggest she sit with this. She does, and says, "I feel like I am on the brink of something."

In the AEDP framework, a new experience is showing up. New experience is the engine of transformative change. Anya asks, "What causes a person to not feel shame?" She replies, "Perhaps because they were told they are perfect." Her thought is: "He's good, so he needn't forgive." Anya reports she is beginning to feel unbelievable anger. She reports the anger is all over her body.

Anya speaks to her father in the portrayal (while imagining him): "I am angry that you put your shame on me. That you are a callous shell of a person. I'm angry at your inhumanity, cowardice, shallow self-loathing, weakness, and that you do not care enough for yourself." Anya shares that her hands are sweating a lot. She feels some smooth muscle anxiety tied to her deeper feelings and insights.

## B Formative Psychology enters explicitly into the portrayal

I next explicitly engage in a Formative Psychology intervention, and share with Anya that she is holding her hands together and her ankles are crossed. I mention that this somatic shape is likely incongruent with her emotional experience of anger and agency. I suggest she explore uncrossing her ankles, and letting her hands be a bit more separate from each other, and perhaps even exploring placing her hands on the arms of the chair. I let her know she may feel both stronger and yet also more vulnerable in this new body organizing stance. I then have her explore feeling and expressing her emotion in this somatic shape. Anya predictably does feel a bit vulnerable at first. Her anxiety rises a bit, and she feels some numbing. She feels as if she is screaming into a cavern. I suggest that she try moving her hands fully apart, and say, "I'm here!" I am suggesting she feel her full presence and existence with her feet on the ground and chest exposed.

Anya reports something very new at this point. She says: "I never have had these thoughts before. The sending of the shame to father; that the shame belongs to him. And the experience of feeling less shame."

I note Anya is leaving the magical child place of idealizing her father. In other words, she is coming out of what Firestone refers to as the "fantasy bond" (Firestone, 1987). She is differentiating from her father in a major way. I reinforce her new awareness by validating that she as a child deserved attention and love, and that nothing was wrong with her as a child. She starts to see the abusive side of her father more clearly, and its many implications in her life. She is also beginning to see the compliant somatic shape she has habitually had in relation to him. And that there is a more satisfying, more differentiated, more boundaried, and self-enhancing body organizing place to be.

However, there is an interpersonal dynamic to be faced regarding this new, more resilient self, as

AEDP calls it. Anya's more differentiated, self-enhancing somatic shape brings forth an inkling of her father now being angry at her. She shares that her somatic shape is becoming shorter and more braced. She reports she is seeking to "hold it together and not be scared." I point out this is likely the way she stopped herself from receiving more active abuse – for example, by fighting in an active fashion. Anya is experiencing another somatic shape that is congruent with the passivity of her internalized shame in the past. Her body is braced and passive. I validate this somatic shape of shame as having helped her survive her childhood. By validating this somatic shape, I can help Anya further undo her shame feelings – a paradoxical healing intervention.

I next explore an intervention involving her hands, arms, and active engagement. I hold up a pillow, and have her explore punching it. This is too scary for her. We later discover that she finds pushing against the wall easier. So I suggest we instead explore her expressing her scared feeling to her father. I educate her that letting a person know he is scary is not a compliment. I am inviting Anya to be open to embodying her agency and power in a grounded, ventral vagal place of honest emotional self-expression.

She enters the portrayal again and says to her father, "I feel scared when you look at me."

We are now no longer dealing with the blank stare that existed earlier in the portrayal. As the client has acquired more insight, more capacity for feeling expression, less shame, and a stronger body-organizing self, she then begins to be more vulnerable as she takes up space in the world, and begins to see actual anger on her father's face in response to her new strength and resilient self.

Anya reports she does not know what to do next: "Shall I cry, run out, attack, lash out at self or other?"

These are all reasonable questions, and could involve the trauma therapy work of Somatic Experiencing that addresses fight, flight, freeze, or collapse (Levine, 1997, 2010). Anya and I have done Big T trauma therapy work in the past. This session is focused more on developmental trauma, and the somatic shape of bracing and being less tall within the window of tolerance.

## Analysis of Anya's portrayal work: Formative Psychology and AEDP

In Anya's portrayal case with her father, we see a cascading of self-states, emotions, maladaptive affects, insights, and questionings. This is common in a dynamic portrayal. We see things come to the foreground, get worked on, recede, and then the next element appears from the background. Anya moved through truth-telling, orienting, sadness, stillness, auditory awareness, her grandmother's garden, anger, shame, insight, body-organizing, big anger, shame reduction, fantasy bond reduction, feelings of being scared, shifting her interpersonal relationship to father, and questioning what comes next. There is much of the implicit becoming explicit, and then becoming engaged and worked with therapeutically.

Two somatic shapes show up in this portrayal. First, there is Anya's hand holding and her crossed ankles; and second, there is her becoming less tall and more braced. The hand holding and ankle crossing is complex and could have multiple functions. As a defense against her feelings toward her father, it helps regulate her anxiety. It is also a self-protective compliant body-shape strategy of signaling to her father she is not a threat. This kept her safe as a child. It could also be part of her maladaptive affect; hence, a complex phenomenon. At a Psychotherapy Networker workshop on March 17, 2016, Janina Fisher spoke of shame body organizing as a self-protective stance that needs to be validated, and ultimately therapeutically transformed. This would be consistent with AEDP's approach.

When we use the Formative How technique to undo this compliant somatic shape, it opens the door to a more resilient shape. Satir (1976) would speak of this resilient somatic shape as more congruent with Anya's words, feelings, and actions. In the AEDP sense, this new resilient body organizing is a new experience. We are at the bottom of the triangle of experience, in core affective experience. This new resilient somatic shape – ankles uncrossed, hands unfolded – allows Anya to more deeply experience her core affective experience – anger at her father, and insight about shame ingestion – and to have a transformative experience when something new shows up. In AEDP fashion, there is a slowing down to metaprocess this new experience and insight. Keleman (1979, 1987) also speaks much of slowing down and digesting what is happening – waiting

for and processing new connections and somatic organization in the present moment.

The second somatic shape shows up when Anya feels stronger and more vulnerable as she comes out of the fantasy bond with her father and confronts him with anger over his not owning of shame, putting it onto her, and not being present in her life in a healthy way. This new somatic shape of being less tall and more braced is not ideal for the long run, but it paradoxically is helpful in the short run. It is an understandable reaction to her now seeing her father more clearly. The therapy interventions with this new compromised somatic shape involved assertive physical movements – using a pillow, wall, and physio ball – and experiencing and expressing her scared feeling (a categorical emotion) to her father in the portrayal. More therapy work will be needed to help Anya become less braced and taller, a more resilient body organizing, in future therapy work.

Keleman (1989) discusses the "bracing against pain" (p. 49), "surprise and stiffening" (p. 53) responses to insult. He explores ways to work with these phenomena very slowly and carefully, unwinding shapes and pausing with each place of this body-organizing continuum process. He also addresses these issues in the context of distortions of love (Keleman, 1994).

Anya's portrayal incorporates her early childhood, adolescent, and adult experiences with her father. Thus she is reorganizing her body across the lifespan of her experience with her father. When discussing Erickson, Mahler, and Benjamin, Russell (2021) speaks to the importance of the transition from dependence to independence to interdependence. Here individuation, self-autonomy, and growing self-capacities are important. The individual is expanding against a hoped-for healthy "we" into a more developed and pronounced "I" (p. 245). We see this happening in the portrayal with Anya evolving out of a fantasy bond and shame ingestion into a more alive, empowered, and differentiated self.

Downing (2015), writing in Keleman's tradition and within his own model of Body-Focused Therapy, speaks of individuals developing a "complex repertoire of body organizing 'know-how'" (p. 309) over the lifespan of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Grand (1998), who edited Keleman's *Journal of Somatic Experience*, likewise emphasizes that the "shaping of bodily experience and bodily structuring of emotion, feeling, and efficacy continue throughout the life span," (p. 172) both inside and outside the family of origin. Finally, in his colloquy with Joseph Campbell, Keleman (1999) also addresses the lifespan from a hero's journey myth perspective.

## AEDP within the model of Formative Psychology: The case of Pedro

### Background

My client, Pedro, has developmental trauma from a dysfunctional family. His being gay was not accepted by his religious father; however, his mother was accepting of his sexual orientation, and gave him good love and connection growing up. His father is narcissistic, and Pedro wrestles with many self-worth and body image issues. He is now well-adjusted to being gay, but struggles with dating and finding a life partner.

Pedro enters my office and shares that the last couple of nights he has lain in bed, with no alcohol, overcome with a wordless, deep sadness. He reports feeling lonely, isolated, and not enjoying what he is doing. He often lies in bed, which he reports is often the only time lately that he allows himself to relax. I share with him that lying horizontally can lead to feeling more vulnerable and to states of regression. It is one reason why Freud worked with clients on the couch. So he accesses this lonely, deeply sad part of himself when he lies down.

### Formative how technique applied to maladaptive affect and categorical emotions of the AEDP model

A decision is made to explore the somatic shape of this wordless, deep sadness that Pedro shares with me. Keleman (1987) sees feelings as having two functions: one is to communicate deep organismic states, like hunger, love and pain; the second is to organize states of awareness and action. In seeking expression, feelings become form. In Keleman's words, "Form and feeling are thus a continuum from liquidity to solidity, from internal experience to external expression" (p. 34).

Keleman (1987) shares that sometimes feelings have few avenues for expression, given societal constraints. Other times a form exists, like "obedience to authority or feeling small," (p. 34) that is no longer of use. Also, feelings can be based in present reality or in the past. This also needs to be closely attended to. Helping new shapes to form for past feelings and present realities is an important task in therapy.

In AEDP there is the important distinction between maladaptive affect and categorical emotion (Lamagna, 2021; Gleiser, 2021). Maladaptive affect needs a unique set of tools to transform it. Categorical emotions have adaptive action tendencies that can move towards completion. Engaging desire, agency, and action is an important pathway to undoing maladaptive affect (Russell, 2021).

I will use the Formative How technique to join Pedro in exploring first a feeling of sadness that is tied to the maladaptive affect of being stuck in loneliness and with fragility. The second part of the case will apply the Formative How technique to a feeling of anxiety and a state of fear tied to avoidant behaviors in a romantic dating context.

## Pedro's formative work with his AEDP maladaptive affect and being stuck in avoidant behaviors

### A Working with the maladaptive affect of loneliness, despair, emptiness, desire, and a brittle self

I invite Pedro to see if he can reaccess his experience of deep sadness when lying on his bed. He shares with me that there is an afterglow of emptiness in his chest, and that his entire body feels like a brittle shell, cracking into his emptiness.

I proceed to join Pedro in this somatic experience and invite him to explore it. I use the Formative How technique. I ask if he can make this brittleness a little more intense. He does, and I ask what this is like. Pedro replies, "At any point it could break."

I suggest intensifying it a little more to continue to learn about what this brittleness means. He does, and says there is "no coming back from this." This is informative, and helps us know how fragile this brittleness is. I also decide it is wise to move in the other direction of undoing the brittleness, and keep Pedro within the window of tolerance.

Continuing with the Formative How technique, I ask Pedro if he can lessen this brittleness a bit. He does, and shares he experiences a deeper breath in his body. I ask what this body organizing place is like. He says he "feels empty, pieces missing, and less imminent danger." It is good he is feeling safer in this place, and can notice and name that there are missing pieces. I suggest to Pedro that he again lessen again this brittle somatic shape a little bit with a micro-movement. Pedro joins me, and notices that he is feeling the "need for less emptiness and more pieces" in his body. I respond by noting his emptiness is asking to be filled up. He is experiencing his deep sense of loneliness.

I decide to employ a resource to create a self-corrective experience for Pedro. I suggest he imagine someone he loves. I ask him what that might be like. He says he could imagine one of his ex-boyfriends. I say that will work. He imagines this, and I ask what it is like. He says he is experiencing being filled up. Pedro shares it is scary and vulnerable to feel a lot less empty. I explain how new positive experiences can be scary sometimes, and when we feel stronger, we can also paradoxically feel vulnerable. Our heart is more open to intimacy, and yet also more open to potential hurt. I invite Pedro to feel his lessened brittleness, and join it with some breath of air to deepen the feeling of this new somatic shape with a resource.

I ask what it is like to be in this place. Pedro replies that he feels sad, since he can access this new more resilient somatic shape only through memory, and he feels little hope of achieving this in life. The maladaptive affect is being engaged and treated in a safe space, and transformative change on Pedro's issues continues to unfold.

### B Working with the somatic shape tied to anxiety, the fear emotion, and avoidant intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors

In the next therapy session, I decide it would be helpful for Pedro if we explore the body organizing of his anxiety about going to a queer book group alone in order to find a partner. I ask Pedro to imagine going to the club, and we can be curious about his somatic shape. As he imagines, I ask him what he notices happening in his body. Pedro

shares he has muscle tightness in his shoulders and his breath is shallow. Using the Formative How technique, I suggest he make his shoulders a little tighter, and see what that is like. Pedro shares that he feels more stable in his somatic shape. He feels he can be less hurt by someone, yet he also has less ability to flee. So we pause and notice the positive aspect of safety, and the negative feature of less flexibility to flee. I then suggest he intensify the tightness in his shoulders a second time. Pedro shares he has less space to be filled up, and less need to do so. He is reporting that the greater somatic tightness has now moved to a numbing place that is less open to nutrition and satisfying his needs. Pedro has growing awareness of the meaning of his shoulder tightness, and how it can contribute to his getting stuck in avoidance, lack of action, and self-destructiveness.

Next we use the Formative How technique to undo this somatic pattern of anxiety. I suggest to Pedro that he do a little bit less of his shoulder tension, and notice what happens next. Pedro reports he feels more grounded, with more security in his core. I ask him to say more. He says he feels his spine. I suggest he stay with that a moment. Sensing his spine helps him feel stronger. I then have Pedro imagine going to the book club from this somatic shape. He says he is able to deal with not knowing anybody. He says his biggest fear is running into his ex-boyfriend.

I then suggest he undo the shoulder tension a bit more. I ask what this is like. Pedro shares that he feels more at ease, centered, and nimble. I ask if he still senses his spine. He says yes. I ask where he feels his centeredness inside his body. Pedro says that his centeredness is in his chest. I suggest he just be with these sensations and body organizing. I ask what it is like.

He says, "It lacks something negative." I ask what is it like to notice this. "Interesting," he replies.

I explain to him, as we slow down and enhance his awareness of this body organizing, that he is able to appreciate what it positively does for him, as well as help him get a sense of how his somatic shape of anxiety limits him. Pedro wonders if these good feelings have to do with his recent good sleep and eating well. I reply that they may contribute to a base of wellbeing, but that he was engaged in his avoidant behaviors and somatic shape of anxiety prior to this time. So essentially, his new resilient somatic shape is the source of his feeling centered, grounded, at ease, and nimble. Pedro finds the psychoeducation helpful.

I next suggest he imagine going to the book club from this new resilient somatic shape of ease, centeredness, and nimbleness, which he senses in his spine and chest. Once again, Pedro is feeling strength, and reports going to the book club is "doable." We discuss for a moment how the stability he felt from increasing the shoulder tension made him less nimble, and ultimately numbed him out from his desire. In contrast, by undoing his shoulder tension, he contacted his spine and chest, his ground, and his center and nimbleness. Pedro gets to digest the paradox that softening himself a bit in this context allows him to be stronger, to contact his desires more deeply, and be nimbler in his life choice maneuverability and feeling.

## Analysis of the Pedro case example: Formative Psychology, AEDP, and emotions

### The brittle somatic shape with emptiness and missing pieces

Two reparative happenings take place when working with Pedro's brittle somatic shape, emptiness, and missing pieces. First, he experiences agency by using the How Technique in the context of AEDP with his maladaptive affect, and his accessing, contacting, and feeling his unmet needs. Second, through his self-corrective experience of imagining a past lover and feeling filled up and satisfied, he discovers viscerally his unmet need for romantic contact, and opens the door to joining me in scheduling queer book club meetings.

Using the Formative How technique, I suggested Pedro do less of the brittle somatic shape. The resulting body organizing allowed for a deeper breath of air. Exploring this further, he shared he "feels empty, pieces missing, and less imminent danger." This is a very good result. Keleman (1987, 1989) feels that being able to shift one's somatic shape and impact one's well-being can be very enhancing to one's sense of personal agency and life control. Also, growing the ability to sense, influence, and contain difficult emotional experiences of emptiness and missing pieces is important to a client's wellbeing. Having a somatic shape that is both firm

and fluid allows Pedro to contact his pulsatory self, contain it, and be informed by it.

Keleman (1987) states the "basic action of living is pulsation, a jelly-fish like pumping motion. It is seen in all the organs, all the muscles. It gives the organism its ability to alter its own movement" (p. 22). He also shares: "Like an accordion, the human is a flexible hollow tube with many chambers that are capable of expanding and elongating, shrinking and compacting, squeezing and releasing" (p. 23). Pedro is using his pulsatory, formative self to shift his maladaptive affect and contact more of his essential self.

Russell (2021) speaks to how important accessing a sense of "agency, will and desire" – core affective experiences – can be for a client to free themselves of maladaptive affect, characterized by hopelessness, terror, and experiences of collapse (p. 249). She speaks of how agency, will, and desire are "affectedly laden self-experiences that can get disrupted, derailed, repressed, denied, and even turned against the self" (p. 252). This turning against the self is the resistance Rank (1978) speaks of as the negative will. The goal is not to let go of resistance, but to transform the negative will into positive will: to support clients in their agency when it manifests, whether in opposition to the therapist or in expansion in life situations. Russell (2021) speaks of the importance of the therapist mirroring the "being of the person's self" (p. 252).

We can see both Pedro's transformative experiences of feeling agency in exploring his brittle somatic shape, and feeling satisfaction/frustration in a self-corrective experience as helping to transform his negative will into positive will. We can use Rank's (1978) concepts of negative to positive will to understand the transformation of Pedro's maladaptive affect of brittleness, emptiness, and missing pieces.

### The anxious and avoidant somatic shape with fear and potential for action

Pedro's somatic shape of anxiety and avoidance tied to going to the queer book club alone is different from his brittle body-organizing of his feelings of emptiness and missing pieces, which is connected with maladaptive affect. His somatic shape of anxiety has more place in the outer world. It is what he presents to himself and others; it has more muscular form, is less fragile, and is likely a defense against Pedro engaging with his core affective experience – his unmet need for romance – at a queer book club. In the AEDP triangle figure, the somatic shape of anxiety/avoidance would be in the upper left (where defenses are) on the triangle of experience (Pando-Mars, 2021). Ironically, in the upper right of the triangle of experience is the inhibitory affect of anxiety. The Formative How method can be used to both undo the compromised somatic shape of anxiety as well as help calm and regulate the sensation of anxiety – thus, having two benefits.

In the experiential dynamic world, there is a distinction between anxiety and fear. Anxiety is often tied to one's phobic reaction to internal emotional or intimate experience. Fear is considered to reference an external event, like a tiger or hurricane approaching. In this example of Pedro and his anxious somatic shape, it is possible we are dealing with both. Pedro is working with his internal world of sadness, agency, courage, love, and experiences of intimacy. Hence, he could be feeling some anxiety about embodying these inner life possibilities, needs, desires, challenges, and feelings. He also is facing the external fear of meeting people he does not know, running into an ex-boyfriend, being found uninteresting or unattractive by gay males who are "very fit, catty, and mean, or super smart." These external fears have a catastrophic side to them, could be tied to Pedro's projections, and could also have some reality to them. People can sometimes be unkind or entitled, unfortunately.

When Pedro intensifies his body organizing of his anxiety, he begins to understand the positive hook of his compromised self-pattern: it is safe, rigid, and numbs out his unmet needs. When he does less of the somatic shape of anxiety, he has contact with his needs, more flexibility, and contact with his spine and chest – all which can support him in embodying his core affective experience of agency, intimacy, and desire.

## Conclusion

A thesis of this paper is that AEDP and Formative Psychology can be integrated with each other to the betterment of clinical treatment of the client. Somatic shape can be worked with in an AEDP portrayal to deepen and alter emotional experience.

When it shows up organically in the portrayal, it can be seen by the therapist, brought to the client's awareness, and jointly explored with the Formative How technique to discover a more resilient body organizing that is congruent with the emotional experience being explored. In addition, this shift in somatic shape supports the deepening of these emotions and insights, as well as opens the door in this dynamic portrayal to new insights, emotional experiences, and somatic shapes to be encountered, engaged, and developed in the future.

Beginning one's therapy session using the Formative How technique to explore the somatic shape of AEDP maladaptive affect (helpless, hopeless, stuck) or complex self states (impatience, the catastrophic, bitterness, etc.) can be most useful. Doing more and less of the somatic shape of maladaptive affect sheds light on the body organizing of a client's being stuck, helps the client feel and understand this tenuous condition more deeply, and creates scaffolding for self-corrective experiences with the maladaptive affect.

Starting therapy with the Formative How technique applied to the somatic shape of a defense/survival strategy or a complex self state (AEDP state 1) can help clients discover the meaning of, and potential solutions to, their body organizing around these matters. This also involves a client dropping down into the AEDP state 2 with a new core affective experience. Then, as one explores this new shape and core affective experience, one can also use the AEDP metatherapeutic processing to enter the AEDP state 3 of syncing this experience more within an individual's neurobiology. If it feels right and true to one's self, then one may be in the AEDP state 4 core self.

AEDP and Formative Psychology are informed by both phenomenology and science. Their models of change are designed to elicit, explore, and deepen new experiences. They are experiential, curious, and respectful of each individual's unique being and its unfolding. They complement and fit each other in many ways. All these together lead to successful therapeutic outcomes.

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